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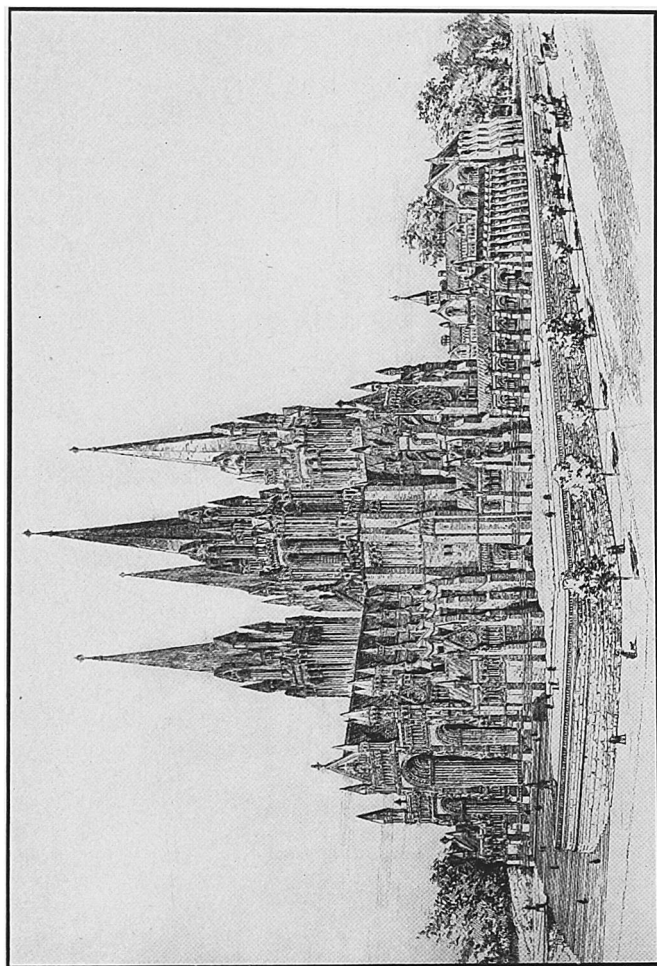


FIG. 3. DESIGN BY MESSRS. PORTER & ROBINSON SHOWING FOUR CENTRAL SPIRES

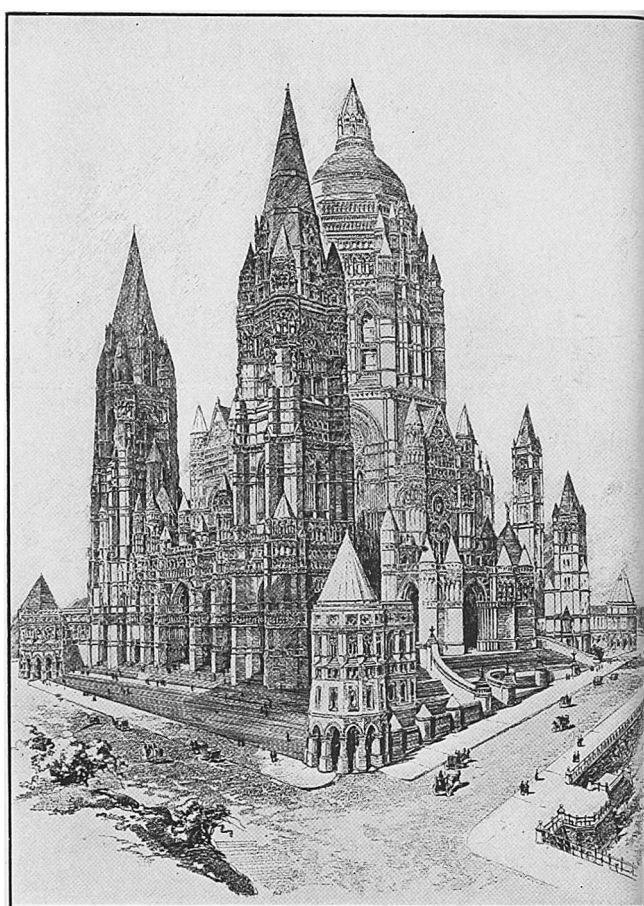


FIG. 4. DESIGN BY MR. WILLIAM HALSEY WOOD

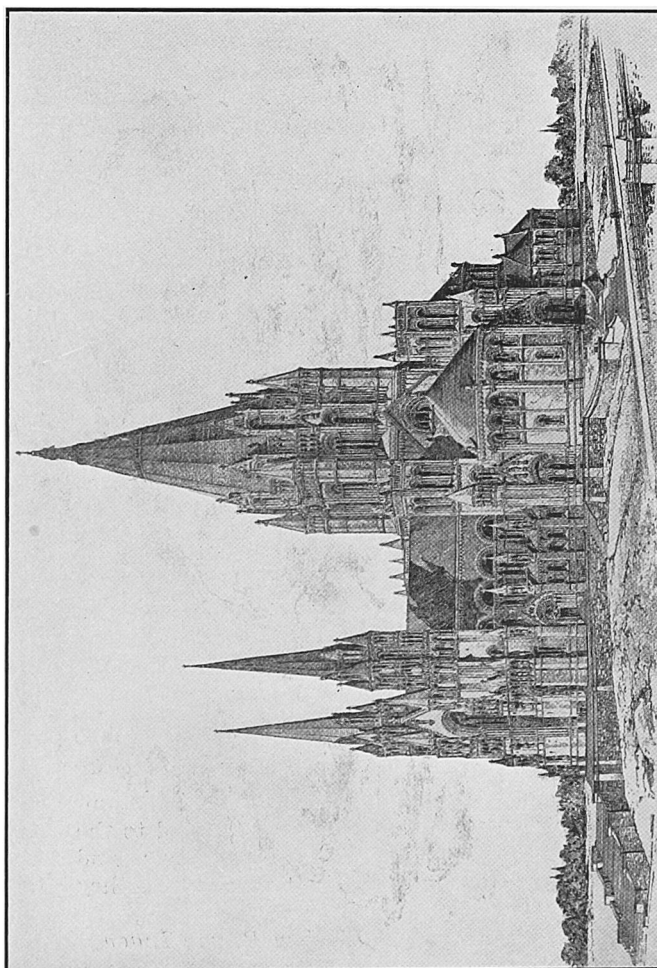


FIG. 1. THE ACCEPTED ORIGINAL DESIGN BY MESSRS. HEINS & LA FARGE SHOWING TWO SMALL SPIRES ON FACADE AND ONE GREAT CENTRAL TOWER WITH SPIRE

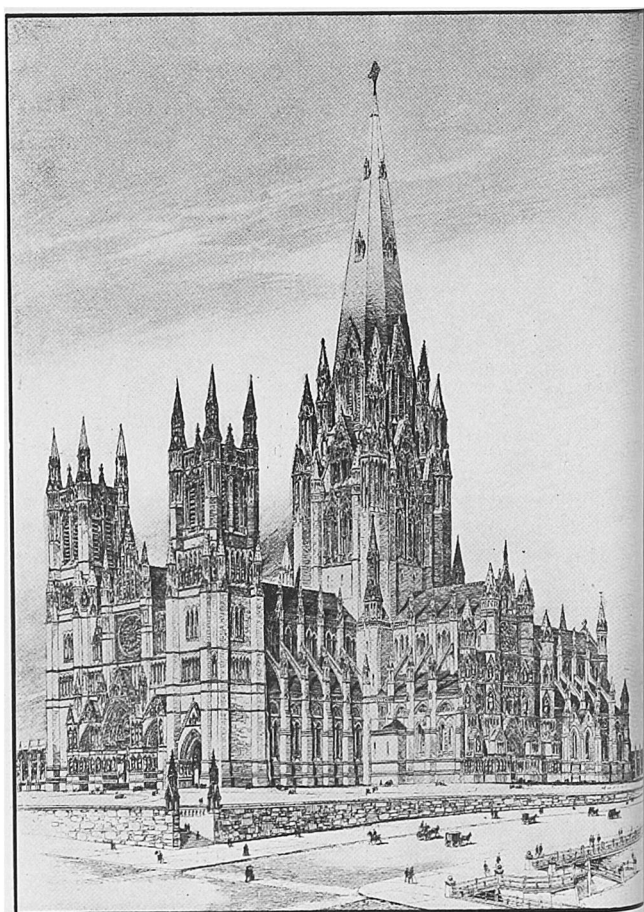


FIG. 2. DESIGN BY MESSRS. HUSS & BUCK SHOWING ONE CENTRAL SPIRE

*Courtesy of Harper's Weekly*

THE FOUR PRIZE-WINNING DESIGNS FOR THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE, NEW YORK  
SELECTED IN 1891  
(See opposite page)

# SHOULD ST. JOHN THE DIVINE HAVE ONE OR TWO SPIRES?

BY GEORGE MARTIN HUSS

(See opposite page and pages 21 to 27)

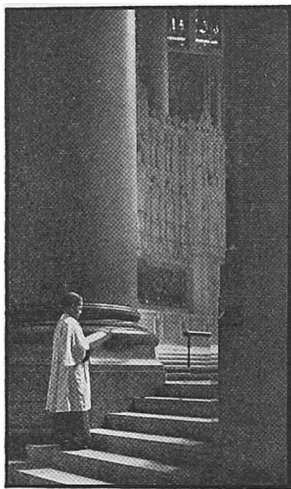


FIG. 5. VIEW INTO THE CHOIR OF THE CATHEDRAL

IT was about 1890 that an agitation was started looking toward the erection on Morningside Heights, Manhattan, of a great cathedral for the use of the Protestant Episcopal Church. A compound competition was called for about the same time—that is to say, a certain number of architects were invited while others, upon their own request, were permitted to submit preliminary sketch designs.

Six months later about sixty sketch-designs were submitted.

Within two months four by the following were selected, viz.: Messrs. William Halsey Wood of Newark, N. J., Potter and Robertson of New York, who were among those originally invited; and Messrs. Heins and La Farge, and Huss and Buck of New York. The selections were made by the Trustees and their advisers. In 1891 the four designs, now fully elaborated, were shown and exhibited at the See House for the selection of the definite design. The four designs are reproduced upon page 20. Of these four, the design of Heins and La Farge was finally chosen (see Fig. 1).

After Messrs. Heins and La Farge were appointed as the cathedral architects George Heins called upon the writer and showed a letter from the Trustees addressed to Heins and La Farge, requesting them to modify their original design—this showed one large central tower and spire with two smaller towers with spires on the westerly façade as shown in Fig. 1 so as to correspond with one of the four premiated designs shown at the See House, for this also had a great central spire and two westerly towers, but these *without* spires (see Fig. 2). As a result of this request from the Trustees, Messrs. Heins and La Farge removed the two spires from their westerly towers and thickened the towers themselves. The total result of these changes is apparent in their final design as shown in Fig. 7.

Now *query?* Why did the Trustees and their advisers request this most important change to be made—going even to the length of making use of the logic and imagination of one of the competitors and authors of one of the four premiated designs (see Fig. 2)? Evidently for only one purpose, viz.: to increase the sublime and monumental effect of the total structure—by emphasizing the central spire and its pyramidal mass. For every competent artist knows that the sublimity of any work of art is increased by emphasizing its pyramidal form. This is true not only of architecture but of

sculpture, painting and even the drama. And that the sublimity of the mass in that design by Messrs. Heins and La Farge actually was increased by these changes, which they actually made, is proved when you compare their original design Fig. 1 with their final design Fig. 7.

That this final change with the resulting majesty was universally approved not only by the great public but by the architectural profession is proved since it has never been questioned. Because it is well known that the majesty of Saint Peter's at Rome, of Santa Sophia at Constantinople, of the Invalides and Sacré Cœur in Paris—not to speak of the Taj Mahal in India, is obtained by not only a dome that is high but by one that is broad. Applying this principle to a Gothic structure, that is to say, making a central spire the overshadowing feature, by turning it practically into a single spire, above all one not only high but much broader than usual, thus Messrs. Heins and La Farge and Huss and Buck between them obtained a mass more monumental and sublime than is to be found in any other Romanesque or Gothic cathedral in the world—while at the same time not departing from the Gothic and Romanesque styles.

Now then, upon what line of reasoning do Messrs. Cram and Ferguson recommend a departure from this majestic and monumental effect, produced by one single overshadowing spire, and recommend the adoption of two spires (see Fig. 6) which would eternally compete with each other, and therefore lessen the sublimity of the mass by lessening the pyramidalization of the composition—this being contrary to the laws of sublime art which have obtained since Cheops built the Great Pyramid—which laws have been followed by the architects of every great work of art and above all in architecture, since Iktinos designed the immortal Parthenon on the Acropolis?

Not only do they substitute two spires for one, thus weakening the total effect, but they suggest building a sort of decapitated tower over the foundation in place of the single spire suggested both by Messrs. Heins and La Farge and Messrs. Huss and Buck. Thus they "cut up" a dominant, single mass into a conglomerate of smaller masses, reducing as it were a mountain to a forest. That this is a serious mistake is proved by the fact that it is positively questioned, not only by some of the strongest men in the profession of architecture both here and abroad, but also by intelligent laymen and members of the other artistic professions. Many believe that if this matter were submitted to a large jury composed of leading architects, sculptors, painters and critics of Europe and America, they would reject the suggestion of Messrs. Cram and Ferguson (Fig. 6) and return at once to the original plan as shown on the final and accepted design of Messrs. Heins and La Farge (Fig. 7) because they feel that the carrying out of the original design of the latter would result in a more sublime cathedral. Therefore those who

ordered the departure from that plan have assumed a responsibility for which they will no doubt be severely criticised by posterity unless a return to the original design is made.

The error of departing from this Romanesque design and switching over to a Gothic is emphasized by the fact that New York already has a Gothic cathedral in St. Patrick's and that also has two spires which will compete with St. John the Divine; but if the latter were built in the Romanesque style with only one tremendous spire the result would be individuality to both cathedrals and

clergy insisted on two spires being raised as at Chartres, Rouen, Amiens, etc.

Further, in the design of Messrs. Cram and Ferguson (Fig. 6) the great central square tower is reduced to a sort of box, above the ridges of the nave, transepts and choir-roofs—and this is flanked by two towers with spires—evidently an adaptation from Messrs. Potter and Robertson's design—one of the four designs that were premiated (Fig. 3) which has four towers with spires.

The trouble with this scheme of Messrs. Cram and Ferguson (Fig. 6) is that, while it shows a



FIG. 6. DESIGN OF MESSRS. CRAM AND FERGUSON SUGGESTING TWO SMALL SPIRES INSTEAD OF ONE LARGE ONE

variety to the architecture of New York. For the building of another cathedral with two west spires would establish a perpetual comparison between the two edifices and lessen the individuality of both. I say this now, even though my own design was of pure Thirteenth Century Gothic (see Fig. 2) but at least sufficiently different from the modern Gothic of the St. Patrick's to have resulted in a strong differentiation. Moreover, cathedrals with double and therefore competing spires were already so numerous in Europe four hundred years ago that for the sake of variety architects often varied the character of the two spires, whenever the

pyramidal effect from one point of view, it loses this from nearly every other aspect, and also the strongly dominating effect of one great central tower is lost! The feeling that a large preaching space exists and planned for within should be expressed on the outside; and it would be by one single tower and the one spire which would cover just this space; and so it was planned by Messrs. Heins and La Farge (see Figs. 1 and 7). But Messrs. Cram and Ferguson minimize the expression of this feature and make the matter worse by adding two smaller and competing spires in front of this space—spires that apparently perform



the function merely of applied ornaments, or of bell-towers (Fig. 6) thus violating the fundamental law of all good architecture that the function of any member of a building should be in harmony with the importance of the function performed; that is to say: the weight which rests upon a column should be neither too light nor too heavy for the apparent supporting power of the column, and the duty to be performed by a spire should be as great as the size and importance of the spire.

In this case the largest practicable dimensions

the central spires or towers of many English cathedrals are worthier and finer culminating features than is the slender *flèche* that alone marks the intersection of the ridges of nave and transept in a French cathedral. In at least one instance—the octagon of Ely—an intelligent attempt was made by the English builders to give value to and express the internal center.

In Saint John the Divine the interior plan of the preaching space or “crossing” is settled; in fact it is built. Here then is an opportunity to express exteriorly this pre-eminent feature of the

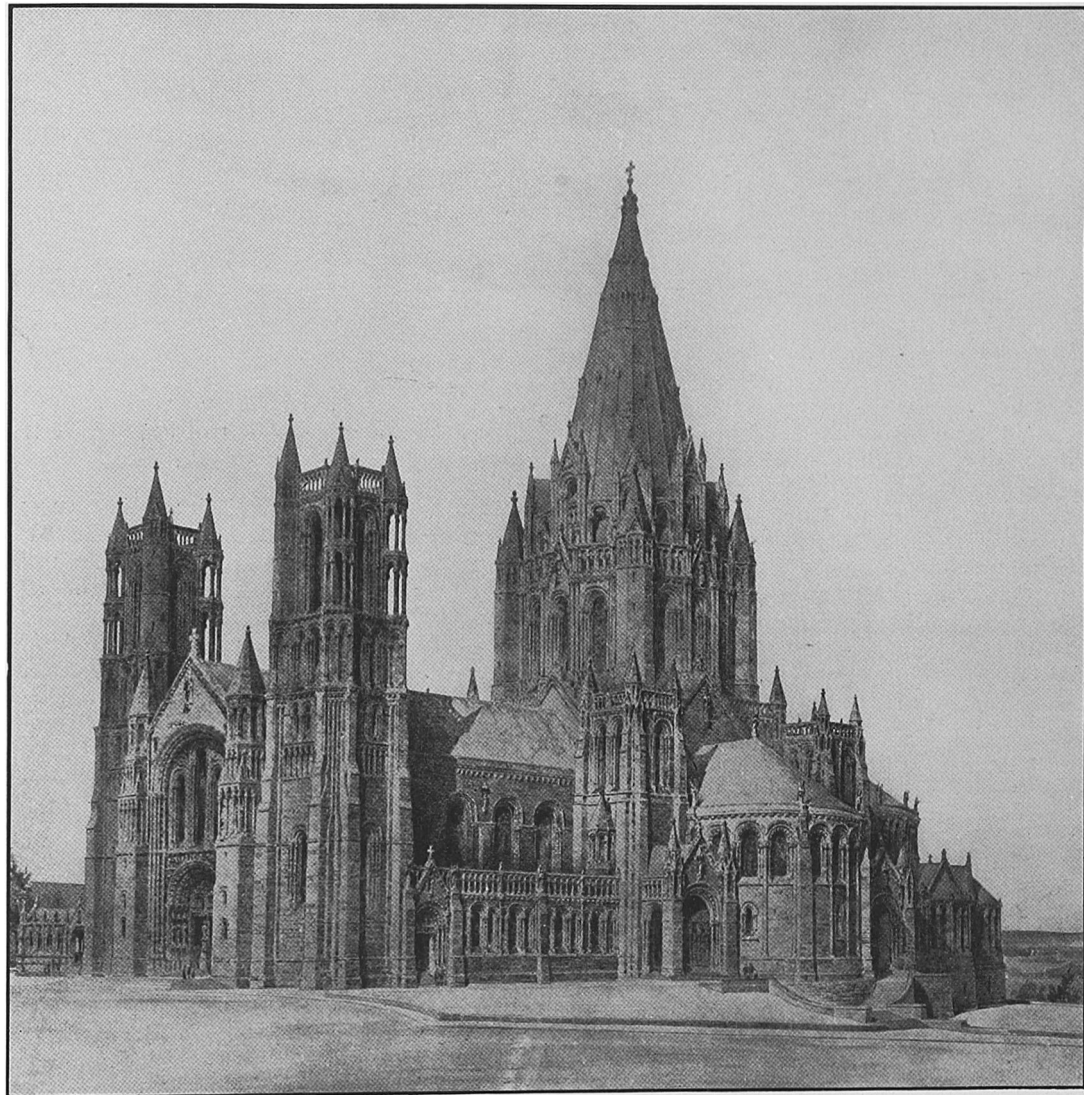


FIG. 7. DESIGN OF MESSRS. HEINS AND LA FARGE WITH ONLY ONE TOWER AND SPIRE

have been provided for the “crossing” or preaching space; and this large, unobstructed area, extending as nearly as may be to the limits of the carrying power of the human voice, should in its exterior expression cooperate with the architectural requirements of the development of the central space. Not only should this be an interior but also an exterior feature. Architects of the English Gothic, who in every other respect were from a generation to a century behind the Gothic architects of the continent, were in this respect clearly in advance of them. Even where no attempt was made at the interior development of the “crossing”

modern Protestant cathedral, the preaching space in one noble dominating spire, which will form a *point d'appui* and crown the Morningside Heights with something more sublime than the one now projected. Further: from the new design of the Western front suggested by Messrs. Cram and Ferguson, and from examination of their plan (Fig. 16) it will be seen that the two frontal towers are *in line* with the *center lines* of the North and South aisles respectively, as in York (Fig. 11) and St. Patrick's, New York (Fig. 12). The contracting optical effect of two towers immediately flanking the nave which will surely result, as at Westmin-

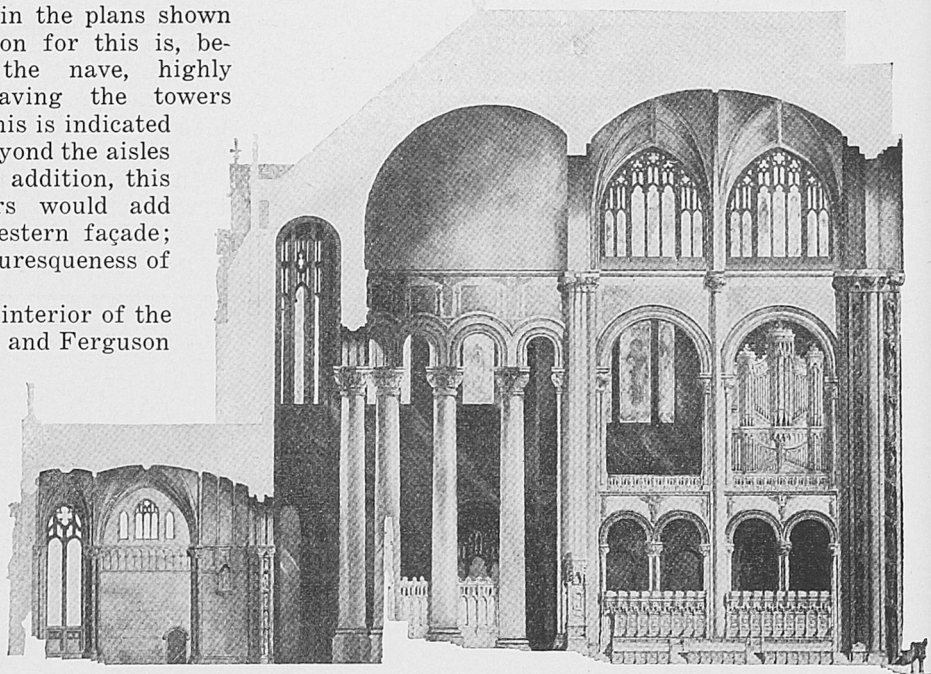
ster, York, Litchfield, etc., should by all means be avoided. It is necessary to place the towers *outside* the sides of the aisles, as in the plans shown in Figs. 14 and 15. The reason for this is, because the accentuation of the nave, highly desirable, is obtained by having the towers separated from the aisles, and this is indicated by the extension of the towers beyond the aisles as in Fig. 14, also Fig. 15. In addition, this manner of placing the towers would add breadth and majesty to the Western façade; also it increases the general picturesqueness of the North and South aspect.

Over the modifications of the interior of the nave suggested by Messrs. Cram and Ferguson (see Fig. 10) we will not quarrel nor over the modifica-

tions of a secondary nature which they have introduced, although they are open to the serious accusation of making more or less of a hodge-podge of a structure that was harmoniously designed, largely carried out and therefore should have been finished in the Romanesque style—a style which is so near to the Gothic in lifting and exalting spiritual power that the difference is hardly worth while quarreling over, above all when the Romanesque design in question is a majestic one handled by two architects of unquestioned skill and taste who must have before them as guides all the successful cathedrals, both Gothic and Romanesque, of the past. As to adaptability for a specific purpose, the design of Messrs. Heins and La Farge seems to answer very well. In a Protestant cathedral the “crossing” or preaching space which gives the utmost possible opportunity for the audience to see and hear the preacher is a matter of special importance and this idea seems to have been kept in view by them.

While on this subject: it is a fact that in their design Messrs. Heins and La Farge departed from the original type of English chancel with *square ends*. Examine their plan Fig. 13 and then the plans of York and Lincoln cathedrals (Figs. 11 and 15). A high authority has said: “It must be remembered, however, that this cathedral is not a building for the Roman Catholic ritual but for the services of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States. There are, therefore, many adjuncts of a medieval cathedral which would be utterly out of place. It would be a grave error to imitate the antique basilicas or the Roman traditions of a choir finished with an apse and its surrounding chapels, which are utterly inconsistent with the ritual of the Protestant Episcopal Church.

“The original type of English chancel with square end (see plans of York and Lincoln cathedral plans, Figs. 11 and 15) notwithstanding all the influence of Rome and the continent, still maintains its ground, as a triumphant proof of the deep hold taken by the original planting of Christianity in Britain and of its vital and unbroken continuity. This peculiarity of English churches is so decisive,



Courtesy Chas. Scribner's Sons

FIG. 8. LONGITUDINAL SECTION OF CHOIR AND LADY-CHAPEL AS DESIGNED BY MESSRS. HEINS AND LA FARGE

so marked, so characteristic: it is no wonder that the English ecclesiologists have insisted on it as the proper rule, and have opposed the use of apses at all in the Anglican churches, or any of its branches.”

In the case of the present cathedral of Saint John the Divine we note that the advice contained in the above quotation has not been heeded and the choir end is irretrievably committed to the apsidal termination with its attendant chapels.

That part is now settled.

In conclusion, the Cathedral of St. John the Divine having been started in the Romanesque style by Messrs. Heins and La Farge, they having been allowed to carry it as far as they did, to the extent of practically completing the choir and placing in the apse the enormous Romanesque columns (see Fig. 9) each one of which is moreover a memorial column—then to force them out as architects and depart from their plans in the Romanesque style and adopt those which are purely Gothic plans with two spires, etc., thus making out of the whole edifice an architectural maccaroni—amounts to a profound æsthetic error,

But we will not quarrel about this. Matters have gone too far for an effective protest. Our main quarrel is over the substitution of two spires for one.

What now remains to be done? Evidently to go back to first principles and to follow as nearly as possible the original and majestic design by Heins and La Farge calling for the one great central spire enthusiastically approved by Bishop Potter, Dr. Morgan Dix and the Trustees of that time, not even to speak of the approval of the competing architects and the cultured public of then and now. The highest æsthetic laws dictate that the suggestion



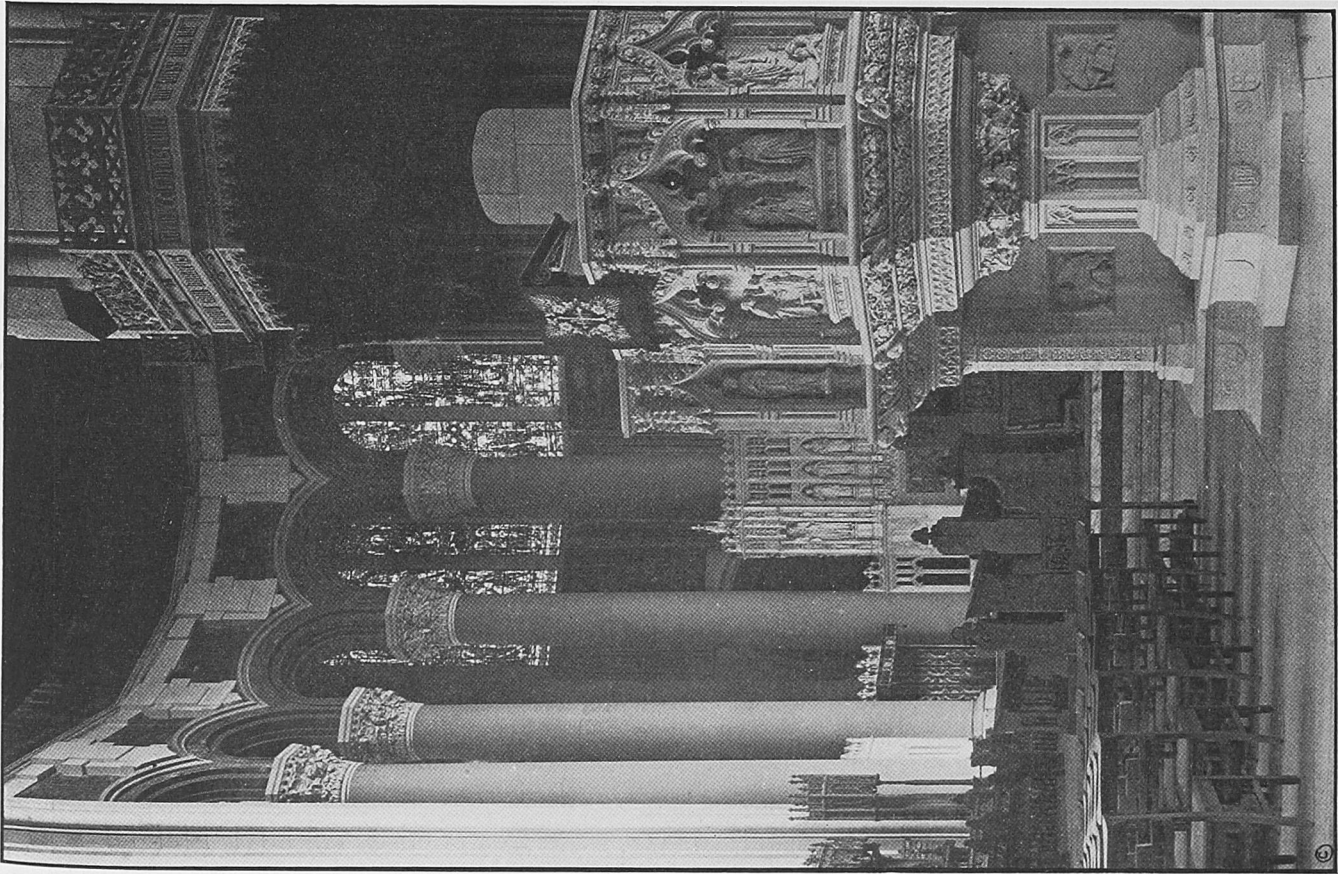


FIG. 9. SOME OF THE ROMANESQUE COLUMNS IN THE CHOIR ERECTED BY  
MESSRS. HEINS AND LA FARGE

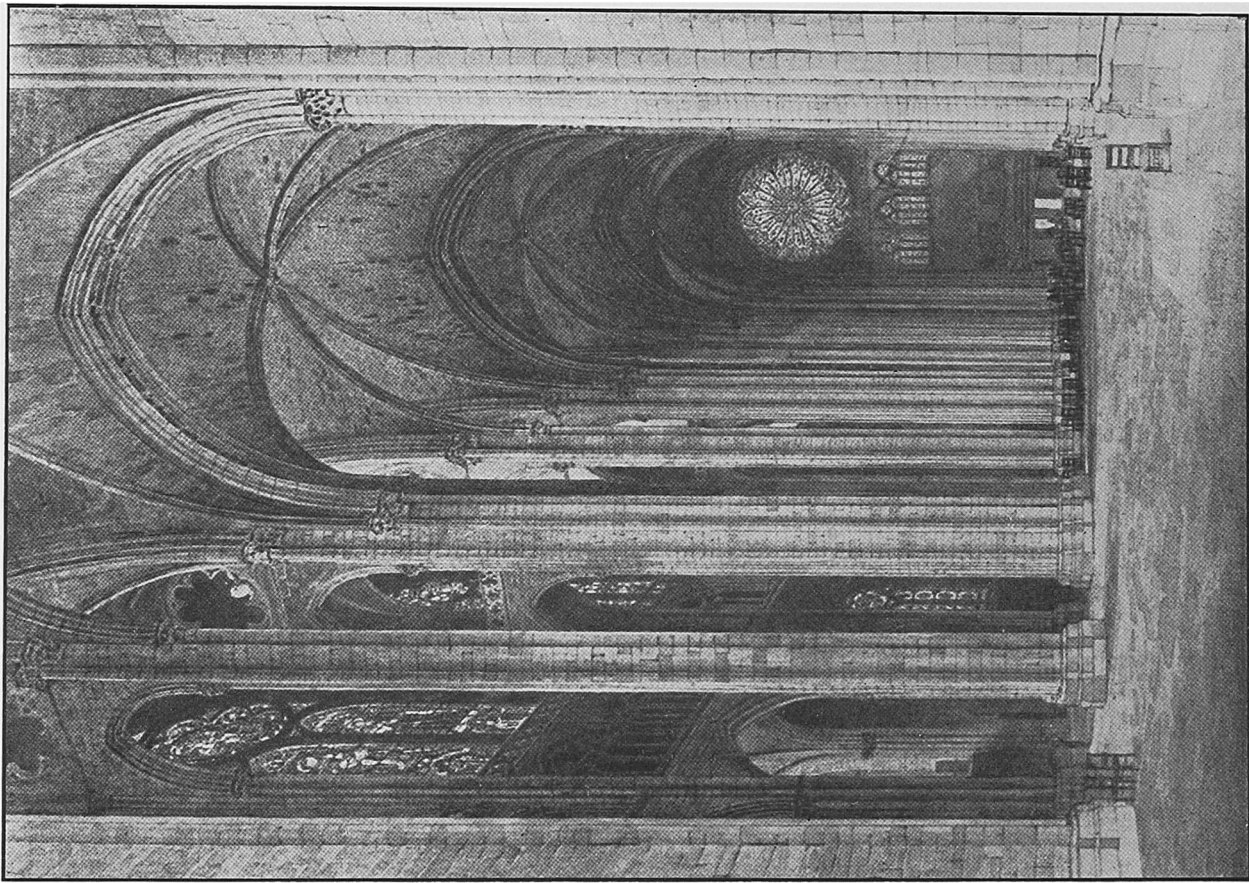


FIG. 10. DESIGN OF GOTHIC NAVE LOOKING WEST SUGGESTED BY  
MESSRS. CRAM AND FERGUSON

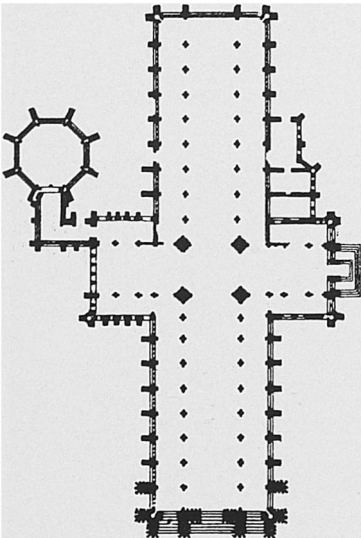


FIG. 11. PLAN OF YORK CATHEDRAL, ENGLAND

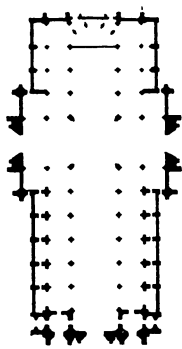


FIG. 12.  
PLAN OF  
ST. PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL,  
NEW YORK

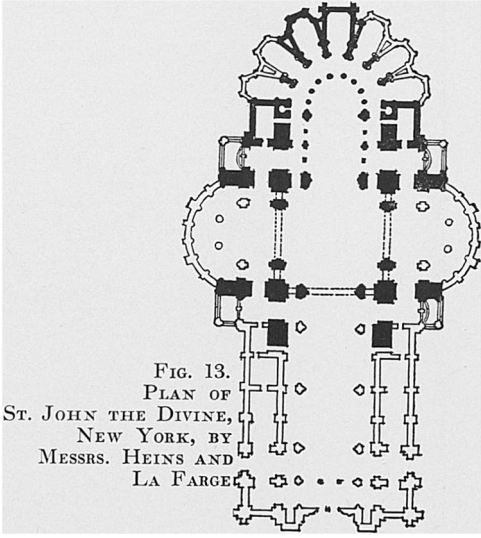


FIG. 13.  
PLAN OF  
ST. JOHN THE DIVINE,  
NEW YORK, BY  
MESSRS. HEINS AND  
LA FARGE

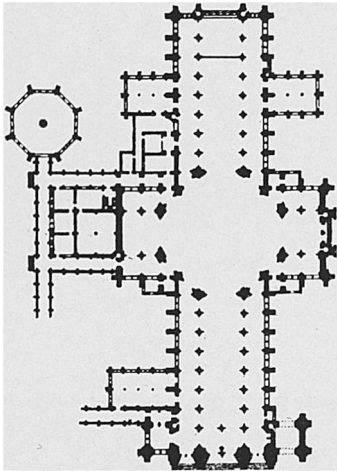


FIG. 14. PLAN FOR ST. JOHN THE DIVINE AS DESIGNED BY MESSRS. HUSS & BUCK

of Messrs. Cram and Ferguson—of two central spires instead of one (Fig. 6) should be positively rejected and the central spire suggested by Messrs. Heins and La Farge (Fig. 7 and Fig. 17) be retained, even if it is built in a purely Gothic style, as there can be no question that the effect will be more solemn, sublime and exalting when the total mass is finished.

It is not too late to do this.

The foundation for such an immense spire was laid by Messrs. Heins and La Farge before they were forced for mysterious reasons from their position as architects of the cathedral.

*George Martin Huss*

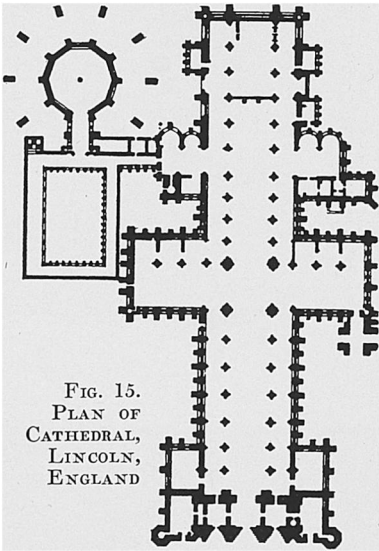


FIG. 15.  
PLAN OF  
CATHEDRAL,  
LINCOLN,  
ENGLAND

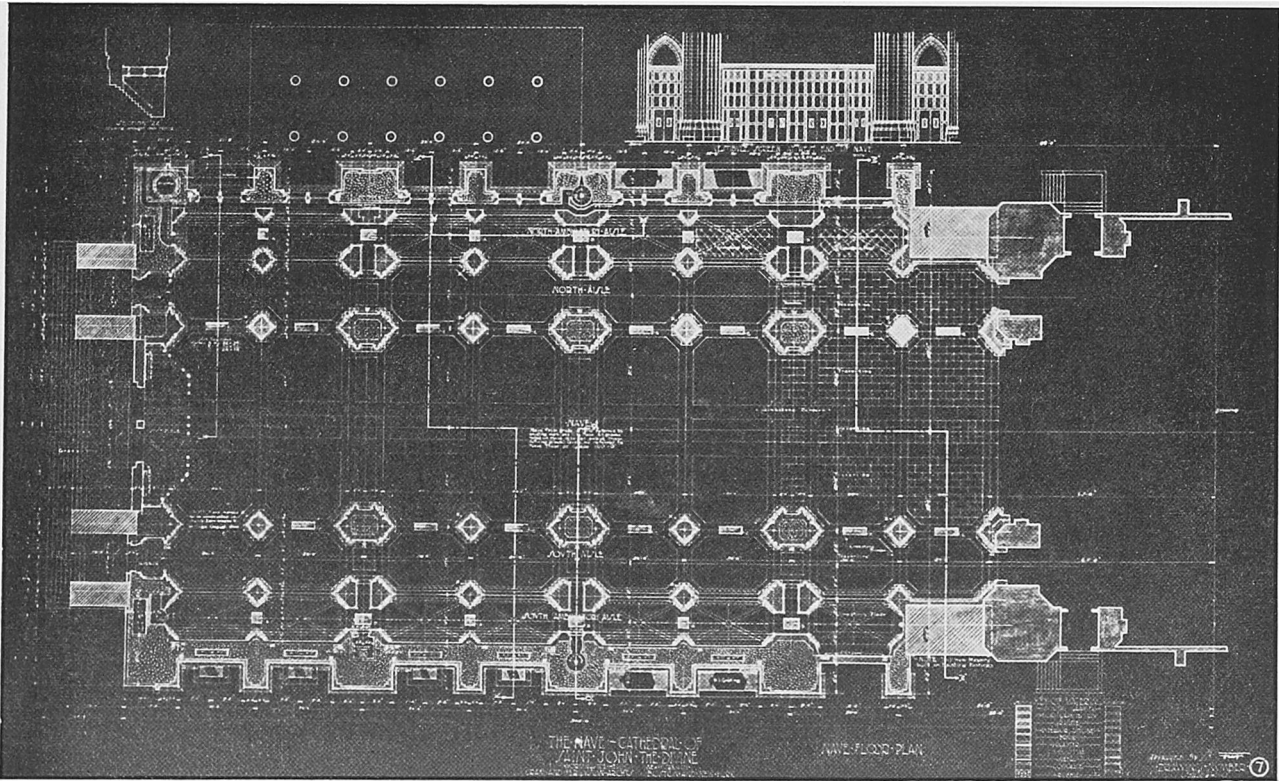


FIG. 16. PLAN OF THE NAVE FOR ST. JOHN THE DIVINE NOW BEING CARRIED OUT BY MESSRS. CRAM AND FERGUSON





*Courtesy Century Co.*

FIG. 17. VIEW OF EAST END OF THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE  
FROM MORNINGSIDE PARK AS IT WOULD LOOK IF THE DESIGN OF  
MESSRS. HEINS AND LA FARGE WERE CARRIED OUT.